



Appropriations Committee  
Public Hearing  
March 8, 2012

**Testimony of Betsy Crum,  
Executive Director, Connecticut Housing Coalition**

**Support: HB 5016, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS  
CONCERNING GENERAL GOVERNMENT, which includes:**

- **Consolidation of state housing programs in a new Office of Housing within the Department of Economic and Community Development**

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Betsy Crum, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Housing Coalition. The Connecticut Housing Coalition is a membership organization that represents the broad, vibrant network of community-based affordable housing activity across the state. Our more than 250 member organizations and individuals include nonprofit developers, human service agencies, resident associations, and diverse other housing practitioners and advocates. Founded in 1981, the Coalition works to expand housing opportunity and to increase the quantity and quality of affordable housing in Connecticut.

I would like to express my strong support for the HB 5016, *An Act Implementing the Governor's Recommendations Concerning General Government* and in particular its consolidation of housing programs into a newly-created Office of Housing within the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). The Governor's plan to make a significant and sustained investment in creating and revitalizing affordable housing signals his great commitment to the health, prosperity and sustainability of our state and to the well-being of all of the citizens within it. HB 5016 would implement a systems change that can help ensure that the investment is made in the most responsive, coordinated and streamlined manner possible.

HB 5016 combines state housing functions into a new State Office of Housing within DECD to provide leadership and facilitate coordination. It also transfers and consolidates a number of housing programs presently administered in different state agencies. As I testified previously, I believe that this change will have several advantages for everyone who accesses state housing programs.

- The present system is fragmented and sometimes bureaucratic and cumbersome to maneuver. By consolidating housing production, operation, and financing for the



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continuum of housing needs, affordable housing can be created and maintained in a way that is more streamlined and responsive to the people who live in it.

- By concurrently establishing strong leadership and vision in the agency that administers these programs, affordable housing can be elevated as the cornerstone to family and community success.

When I testified last month you asked that I give careful consideration to this element of the Governor's proposal and the potential impact on the housing community and the low and moderate income people we serve. I can tell you with certainty that the affordable housing practitioners working in our state are excited about this potential. We have been frustrated since 1995 when the Department of Housing was folded into a new DECD, effectively making housing a low priority. Funding has steadily fallen off since that time, and the state's commitment to creating a continuum of affordable housing (including units for our lowest income families and individuals) has ebbed with it. Housing programs transferred to the Department of Social Services are administered by staff with little or no expertise in real estate development or operations, making it difficult to leverage housing resources across state agencies.

Today we have the potential of a new environment where housing is appropriately seen as the cornerstone of health families and sustainable communities, and the Governor's proposal to create and staff a new Office of Housing is an excellent step toward re-establishing the primacy of housing. We all know the "devil can be in the details" and these changes will need to be managed carefully and thoughtfully. As with everything in government, the key will be leadership, and in particular the individual who will fill the new Deputy Commissioner position. That individual will need to hold the vision of a responsive and dynamic Office of Housing that funds real estate development in the context of service to our lowest income and most vulnerable populations. While housing creates jobs and can be a wonderful tool to stimulate the economy, it is also first and foremost *home*. A new Office of Housing can be instrumental in advancing that renewed vision.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments, and I would be happy to respond to any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Betsy Crum  
Executive Director